

**Interviewee:** Dr. Ramona Tascoe

**Interviewers:** Dr. Tiffany Caesar and Sydney Jackson

**Video Recorders and Student Assistants:** Dr. Tiffany Caesar and Sydney Jackson

**File:**

**Date:** May 13, 2024

**Location:** Oakland – Dr. Ramona Tascoe’s House

**Collection:** 1968-1969 San Francisco State Strike Oral History Collection

**Length:** 1 hour 28 minutes 44 seconds

**Transcriber:** Tiffany Caesar

**Bio:** Dr. Ramona Tascoe was a key player in the SFSU 1968 BSU/TWLF Student Strike. On day one of the student strike, she became the first person arrested while she was reading the 15 demands of the Black Student Union. However, she was not detoured from finishing her SFSU degrees – triple majoring in political science, sociology, and psychology. Later, she would enter UCSF medical school and graduate in the top of her class. While practicing medicine, her humanitarian efforts led her to multiple countries like Kenya and Tanzania where she partnered with the people to create better medical infrastructure, participated in agricultural innovation, and served as a medical ambassador helping in time of conflict. Currently in her spare moments in between extensive political advocacy and global humanitarian, you can find Dr. Ramona Tascoe tending to her beautiful grandchildren in Oakland, California.

**Abstract – *Solidarity Highlights:***

**Interview Transcript:**

00:00:03 **Tiffany Caesar:** What is your full name?

00:00:06 **Ramona Tascoe:** Ramona Mae, Tascoe, Mae – M-a-e, Tascoe, T-a-s-c-o-e

00:00:16 **Tiffany Caesar:** Where were you born? And can you tell us a little bit about your family background?

00:00:24 **Ramona Tascoe:** Sure. I was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana at Our Lady of the Lake Hospital. The first of five children to be born in a hospital. And um I have two older sisters and two younger brothers...

Came out of a household with a steady uh access to two dedicated devoted parents.

00:00:51 **Tiffany Caesar:** Why did your family come to California or how did you come to California? From Louisiana?

00:01:03 **Ramona Tascoe:** So, I was born in 1949 and in that period of time, there was a migration pattern west. Many people in the south, particularly in Louisiana were moving due north uh or due east, but very few were going northwest. And uh my father had an opportunity after attending Southern University in Baton Rouge. Yeah, uh engineering to uh test for a job at the San Francisco Bay Naval Shipyard. And he apparently scored quite well in the 98th percentile and was offered a job in the engineering division of uh the San Francisco Bay Naval Shipyard. He accepted the job. And it was a very unusual uh opportunity at that time in history. So he left his family for about seven months, uh established himself in his new job and uh got an apartment uh bought some Southern Pacific uh railroad tickets and sent for his family. And the rest is history.

Uh while he was waiting for his family to arrive on his way to the shipyard every day, he saw this little Catholic school with little children dressed in uniforms, uh seeming to acquire a first-rate education. And so I was educated in a private Catholic all-girls school for 12 years. As were my other four siblings, two boys went to 12 years private Catholic school and the three girls to the same school as well. Notre Dame.

00:02:53 **Tiffany Caesar:** Can you tell us where in California the school was?

00:03:03 **Ramona Tascoe:** Sure it was in San Francisco...347 Dolores street right across the street from the old mission. One of the 21 historic missions in the state of California was founded by father um Francisco, whose name, by the way, was the source of the name San Francisco, Saint Francis.

00:03:30 **Tiffany Caesar:** Thank you, Sydney. I know you had questions about her childhood. So did you want to ask those now?

00:03:38 **Sydney Jackson:** Right. Um ok. So I was wondering what the demographic was like at your Catholic school?

00:03:45 **Ramona Tascoe :** Oh, that's a really good question from first grade through 12th grade. We had a maximum of 50 students. A minimum of 48 and from first grade to eighth grade, I was the only black. Um And from high school, I was one of three...

Of interest though, by the time I went to high school, uh that's eight years later, uh we found opportunities that were to our advantage. It was the early sixties, 1963- 64. And so to have three blacks in one class, there was obviously some affirmative action efforts before affirmative action actually was identified as an institutional practice. And um by the time we graduated from high school in 1967 those same three blacks were the top three officers for the senior class and for the student body, uh one was the student body president. I was the student body vice president, and I was the president of Student Council. Uh the other third of the trio of blacks in our high school was the senior class president. So we knew and we felt the reality that it was a friendly enough environment that they made some sort of effort or the kids. It was their vote that they picked the three blacks uh to be their leaders. For that period of time...

I say it was possibly uh an affirmative effort coming from the students, but coming from the faculty, it was slightly different because I was this also the class valedictorian and had um theoretically the highest grades and had a leadership role. And historically, my high school, marked it centennial year in my senior year and for the duration of the school's existence, the senior where the valedictorian automatically had certain privileges uh for your scholarship to college of your choice.

And um there were two pages dedicated in this yearbook uh for the valedictorian. And each of those privileges eluded me. And it was very disillusioning that I could compete and achieve the title, but not the privilege. And that disillusionment probably had as much to do with my uh readiness to go to San Francisco State College and hear the rhetoric of resentment, hear the rhetoric of disparate treatment though I didn't experience it necessarily as maybe black students who had attended public school uh for 12 years.

But when I went to San Francisco State, I went with a sense of be betrayal that I worked hard. I earned privileges and I didn't acquire them.

00:07:22 **Sydney Jackson:** Was there a sense of you talk about being excited or more open to hearing the rhetoric of the black students at San Francisco State when you arrived? Was there a culture shock coming from the Catholic small Catholic school to San Francisco?

00:07:40 **Ramona Tascoe:** That's a great question. Yeah. Uh when I started San Francisco status, I had my hair was straight and, and being out of Louisiana, mixed uh ethnicity, a creole, French. Uh my mother is light creole, looks more Cajun and Creole. My father is a dark creole and so five children, each of us are a different shade. But all of us have my mother's long hair. OK? And uh my mother doesn't have to put anything on her hair, but we have what we call then growing hair. And so my mother would grow our hair. And so otherwise still, you know, when it gets a certain length, I just kind of put it in a ponytail.

But that sort of experience growing up as a young San Franciscan student in a private Catholic all-girls school. But being a negro was a bad enough experience because we were self-conscious of our color, we were self-conscious of our ethnicity and we knew that we were the lucky ones who were in a private school and that we didn't have to worry about being stereotyped as those, those "Ns" or those, you know, you know, you know how the negros are negros, niggas, negros. But the tone made it a pejorative. And uh growing up as a kid in San Francisco, I was just really glad that I had a uniform to wear to school every day. And I was glad I had growing hair because we didn't have extensions and uh we didn't have products, hair care products. It's just royal ground grease or Wild root cream oil Charlie. That was the name of it, Wild Root, wild root Creole Charlie.

And um the experience of growing up as a negro and going to San Francisco State, my context was not in harmony with the context of most of the students who I met.

Um they look more like the students who went to the public school. They spoke more like the students who went to the public school and yet they were friendly and their friendliness toward me made me feel for the first time, a sense of oneness with being a negro among others.

I say being a negro among others, but in fact, in 1967 we had been wrestling with the issue of what title we would be referred to as it was the season of James Brown. Say it loud, I'm black and I'm proud...um that song all by itself and I wanna say 1967 maybe 67-66 maybe. Uh prompted so many black folks. It was almost universal. The impact of James Brown's song became our anthem and say it loud. I'm black and I'm proud meant that you had to look like you were black, and you

were proud. And so my parents who were accustomed to seeing my hair braided in a ponytail. You know, it was like, what are you doing in your hair?

And I'm looking at my classmates and their hair curled. I know my hair will curl, you know, when I wash my hair, it curls. And so I, I remember the first day I decided to wash my hair and just go to San Francisco State with it like that. And all of the black students were thrilled. All right, sister.

And then I had to find a place to ball it all up, put it together before I got home. That didn't last very long because, you know, 17, we start rebelling. We start doing life as we feel most comfortable and we have a peer pressure of others who are either living in the dorms or they've separated their authorities, uh their personal authorities from the authorities of their parents. And having the experience I had made me a slow learner, a slow to rise in the direction of activism. But because of that experience of disparate treatment around being class valedictorian, not getting my scholarship and uh not having my two pages in the yearbook with my speech on one side and me delivering the address on the other, it prompted me to rebel in a way that too many might not seem any sense, might not make any sense. But um I was, I was so angry about it that I left Catholicism. I left the church, decided if I take on religion at all, it won't be Catholicism again. Uh I was just in a state of rebellion, and I was Prime Pickens for what was going on in the Civil Rights Movement.

And uh in that first year, uh 1967 the fall, different leaders had been assassinated or had been threatened with this. Uh John Kennedy had already been killed and that took place in my second year in high school. And I wasn't a black student who had any angst toward a white man who was liberal. In fact, John Kennedy was a highly respected white man among and toward negros. And we felt that we had a shot at some privilege and opportunity that we otherwise had not. So when he died, we wept and uh 2-3 years later when his brother was killed, uh well, of course, we were two years older and more expected that great things will at least come from his brother. In fact, this is an aside when I was in high school, I wrote a letter to Robert Kennedy inviting him to come to our school to mark the occasion, the memorial of his father his brother's assassination.

And this would have been the second time I did something like that. And the first time I did it, I invited the mayor of San Francisco and he came.

So the second time I did, I stepped it up to the presidential candidate, Bobby Kennedy. And uh I sent the letter to Senator Robert, uh Kennedy... S.O.B uh S.O.B stood for senate office building.

I didn't know the significance of S.O.B. That's how naive I was.

And so I got a letter back from his office saying next time you want the senator to speak, you should probably spell out the words, the letters s o b that's a true story. I, I should have told you that you should get up.

Uh And I think part of what I wanna say here is that before the strike, we, we were all kids. We were all part of our generation of youth who were exercising our independence. Most of us were virgins and we were talking among ourselves on when that day might come for us. We were innocent young people and the assassination season, children being blown up in a church. Um And this sense of rebellion for us began to grow and it hit some more uh concretely than others. Uh Probably because of the more harsh experience they would have had going to public school.

And uh the harshness of my experience was having to live like I wasn't a negro.

I had to learn how to value my hair being longer. At least you're not one of them. Ok? I had to comb it a certain way. Well, at least you can wear bangs. You know, theirs won't stay down. Ok? If they sweat, it'll go up.

And so to be raised in a household where you knew you were a negro. Ok? But you weren't quite equal, you weren't at all equal to white folks, but you have white folks who liked you. But then you had white folks who kinda acted as some sort of way towards you, but you didn't know how to frame that and you were told never talk race, don't ever talk race cause we came out of the south, out the south and your father took you all away from Jim Crow. We don't need to bring Jim Crow into our household. We're all the way in California. Don't talk race just, yeah, the mama puts more powder on your face and that powder would be several shades lighter than the complexion. And so trying to live as a person who was someone of color without the, um natural products that would have a uh advantage, color or beautified color.

And to exist in the community in which in my family, I was the youngest of youngest girl, the middle child of five kids, but I was also the darkest of five sister who looked like um Elizabeth Taylor, Snow White. My mother was snow white with curly kitchens, which was the giveaway that she was mixed. And uh when people found out she was from Louisiana. Oh, you're one of those creoles. Ok. My sister had similar hair as my mother, my eldest sister and then the sister who was just a year older than me, her hair grew faster, grew thicker, longer and she had a more keen nose, ok? And she had features that were more akin to being a mixture of something.

But I was the one who to them looked most negroid as in the ones who are having trouble and so try to fix yourself until I got to San Francisco State.

And so San Francisco State when we started there, I was the odd person out. I had been socially isolated, but the BSU was going through a cultural revolution, and they were having gatherings on campus on a daily basis, and they were introducing negro students to the concept of being African related.

And so we would go to the gallery lounge once a week, twice a week where we would see Dolores Kayu do African, Afro Haitian dance or African Dance. Some of the students who were taking your class were learning how to do the African head roll and uh drumming and uh wearing colors. Whereas most Negroes told unless you're low class, if you're low class, you'll wear pink lipstick because you won't know better. Ok? And you'll wear pink lipstick because you're trying to make your lips not as dark. Ok? And everybody kind of had an aesthetic for what pink lipstick looked like. It, it wasn't, but that's all we had.

But struggling with identity was uh the order of the day from 1966-1967. And toward the end of 67 it only took about a year, year and a half, helped by this assassination era, Malcolm X, Medgar Evers. All of that James MEREDITH trying to get into college and being the only black student, it was just a groundswell of conflict emotionally, psychologically for that class of students who were entering into higher education at high school, and they were bringing their context to the equation. And we were learning that even though we had a different con we might have had different contexts. We had some common factors, common threads that made it possible for us to welcome the adage - I'm black and I'm proud, say it loud. I'm black and I'm proud.

And that was a unifying theme and that unifying theme was also enhanced by the determination that Afro Sheen was a good product and that Afro actually is pretty and how long is yours? Oh God, I wish I, oh, I love the way yours. We were falling in love with the nature of hair, and we were finding different ways to groom our hair that were natural for us.

And so yes, to answer your question, what was that experience? Like it was, it was groundbreaking, and it was so powerful that when some of our young black men decided that they didn't like an editorial that was written in the school newspaper that tried to take us back, and the manner of language that was used what was supposed to be an ideological assertion became a loud argument that ultimately, I believe, I believed it, then I believe that now, particularly after so many years of

study and observation, it was a breaking point because we had finally begun to find ourselves.

It's kind of like when you turn 18 and you leave home, or you stay at home. But you know, when you leave home and you're going off to college or the job, you're free, you're free in a way that you weren't free when you were growing up with your parents telling you what to do with it. And you can't, you can't put that genie back in the bottle. And so for those students who entered in 66-67 we had been freed. The, the take the shackles off our feet so we can dance...we did, we did and our, it started off cultural...then it became the eyebrow. You see that look, it, it got intense. It went from being just cute and oh, what are we gonna have at the lounge...A girl, that child, she can dance. You know, God, I that purple on you girl. That looks good. We went from that sort of light discussion and yet very critically important discovery to the reality that people were dying and, and, and people had lost their lives all because of this notion that we were, we were wanting to be treated free. And James Brown said it right when he said we're black and we're proud this conflagration of enlightenment hit in 67 and it didn't take long. Learning curve was not steep.

It was like we woke up and when we saw the editorial, we saw the brothers coming back down from the editor's office.

Police were looking for them trying to hide one of the brothers in the BSU hut. Uh then they ultimately were taken away. Danny Glover being one of them.

That was, that was the line drawn in the sand because the brothers had found their voice and they were standing up for and they were refusing to bend to tell how dare this white boy got us in, in an editorial. Look at it. OK? We found our voice and uh then we became one.

And so, whereas when I first started, given my context, the students saw me as the odd bird.

It was one of the reasons why I became so devoted to the BSU and over daily in the BSU office to bring to the table that which I thought other students had. But I didn't realize that the value of my education allowed me to do certain things more naturally.

And there were others who were talented too, but it was one of the reasons why I was devoted to that role because I knew the discipline of it all.

00:27:17 **Tiffany Caesar:** What year did you join the BSU?



00:27:21 **Ramona Tascoe:** 1967...I started in uh August, August 13, 1967..it was campus kickoff. And um by September, I'd already joined the BSU.

00:27:37 **Tiffany Caesar:** What was your role in the BSU?

00:27:42 **Ramona Tascoe:** It was clerical. Uh It was that of a receptionist greeting students. If they came in very often, there was either some poetry or an announcement or a speech that had to be typed up then. Uh ok, they don't, do you know that it is a ditto machine is, it's like Harvard paper, you type on one, pull the carbon out, then you put in the machine and then manually turn the spindle and it prints as many copies as you're able to turn. So we would operate all of the uh clerical equipment and type.

I was, I was one of two students who type, type well and Glory Lowry. Lowry glory Lowry was one of the students And uh myself, me, I was always the typist for uh Minister of Education Black Panther Party. Uh George.

Oh because he had really, he was, he couldn't write legibly like, but he was brilliant, George Murray. And uh you probably heard the story of George Murray having been a grad student in San Francisco State and, and uh he ultimately had some difficulty with the curriculum that he was going to be teaching and there was a resistance to it, particularly when they learned that he was Minister of Education for the Black Panther Party. And, and they tried to block him from going forward and he said you educational pursuit...

So he started writing editorial columns in the Black Panther newspaper and he was a prolific writer, prolific thinker still is. And uh whenever he would write, he would have a spiral bowel notebook and he would write and he would just continuously be turning pages like this explosive thought and he would come to me and hand me the sister, sister uh is there any way you think you could type this up for me and that I had a knife for his writing and I was, and then he got, he said, do you think you'll have it tomorrow? Give me a couple of hours on it and, uh, to this day he'll tell you I was the one who could decipher his hieroglyphics. And, uh, I never, I just knew that it was deep. I knew it was intelligent and I knew that it had a purpose, but I, I wouldn't have any recollection for any detail because I was green, I, I didn't know who I was. I just know that I was on a journey, and I was in a, in a setting in which I was learning who I was, and I was learning to be empowered about who this little Negro girl was, who's still very angry at those Catholics and those nuns...didn't do right by me...

00:31:25 **Sydney Jackson:** Um So what is a question I just thought of now, but was there a lot of overlap between the Black Panther Party in San Francisco State's BSU?

00:31:42 **Ramona Tascoe:** Yeah. Another very good question. Yes, it was. And it was proactively overlapping the um Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, Um and George Murray, those were the three main people who we saw a lot who were members of the Black Panther Party and Huey was pro education, but he wasn't as focused on it at that time. He was just a natural thinker...Uh activist and was unafraid to speak uh Bobby similarly, but not as academic, but more a community organizer and outspoken. Uh And then there was George, you know, who could take the ideology of what he was hearing and frame it against a book that maybe he had read or heard about. And uh then he'd always have an article that he would write.

But the other than that level of academic acumen and focus, uh the Black Panther Party saw the BSU as a critical subdivision of the activist movement of blacks. And so even though they align themselves and they knew all of us, we knew all of them, they were on campus, they were on campus I think as much for the inspiration of being on campus, um It was like a hub, not like they didn't have a hub in the community, but what they were cultivating was something else, something that we were cultivating as students. And that was the reality that though we were in college, we were also representing our families and the opportunities our family didn't have. You have an opportunity to be in college. OK, your community needs you to your community needs you.

And so the concept of the community needing us to be successful, needing us to go to college, needing us to take advantage of uh whatever uh successes could be acquired by either the the Black Panthers fighting for education uh or speaking to the value of education. Uh Many of the Black Panthers were well read and um even some with controversies like uh Eldridge Cleaver, you know, had written books. OK. And they had ideologies that they spoke to because they had either heard about other books or they had read other books or it had been summarized for them, the significance of what was written in books written by other educated peers like the, Stockley Carmichael. OK. And understanding that they weren't the first generation of educated or potentially educated, there was a whole, there was a depth of awareness that the Black Panther Party had in large measure due to the visioning of Huey and Bobby where they understood they had an obligation to the community dream for higher education, for their kids. They knew education was gonna be the secret to um their children's success and the opportunity for the family to be lived enough.

And so the Panthers never did anything ever did anything that would interfere with the pathway that the student was on in any way that was apparent to anyone including himself. And so they saw the BSU as their hope, their expectation. We're fighting for you to be successful. And these kids who we're feeding in the Breakfast For Children program, we want them to eat well so that they are not hungry when they go to school so that they can learn better. And one day be where you are and So we had great respect for the Panthers, and they were warm. They, they were like family.

00:36:38 **Tiffany Caesar:** What was the role of black women in the development and origin of the Negro Student Association and the Black Student Union?

00:37:02 **Ramona Tascoe:** It's a good question because uh at one time there was a controversy over who were the founders, even of the Negro Students Association.

The founders of the Negro Students Association were uh two maybe three-fold. Uh Maryom Al-Waddi or Mariana Al-Waddi, um she answers to both. She's still alive and well, she's 96 years old.

And uh by coincidence was in the same facility as Dr. Nathan Hare is right now. And to this day, clear as a bell and uh she was a privileged daughter of an educated black woman who wanted her daughter to have a sense of authority, purpose, wanted her to be well educated. And uh she was a single mom and uh Mariam was maybe 10 years older than most of the students who were there who were there in 67-68.

Mariam was at that stage in her life where she was ready to be a mom. She was kind of like big sister to everybody, but she was ready to be a mom and became a mom in that first year and a half, two years uh in the kickoff to the strike in the lead up, Mariam conceptualized along with a couple of brothers, the Negro Students Association.

And she thought, and to this day would probably claim with some legitimacy credit for having conceptualized the Negro Students Association, even though she was not um fond of the word Negro.

And uh she was a sister is the idiom of our, of our communication among one another, we might say she was a sapphire, a sapphire...She could be loud. She, she get all up in your face. She could tell you about yourself.

And obviously these are things that I learned about who I am and who my people are. But I do remember her having all of these qualities that were very intimidating to this black girl.

And what was very apparent though was that the brothers were scared of her, and it was scared more of a respect that scared because no, it was the brothers were learning to be men and stepping up and saying hell no, I ain't gonna go in other words, no, I'm not going to Vietnam. Ok? Oh no man, I go to Canada before I go to Vietnam, they were finding their voices as men and they were saying uh if I'm not gonna be drafted, ok, I'm gonna be in school, I'm gonna get my education. Hell, I'm gonna be a lawyer. I'm gonna be a doctor. Most of the brothers became accountants or businessmen. But we had those who wanted to become lawyers and Indian Chiefs as it were...

The relationship between the brothers and the sisters during the time of the BS, the uh Negro Students Association, which was in the early sixties, not 59 but sixties those days were characterized by uh the influence of private HBCU campuses. If you went to college, it was because you were privileged.

But we're at San Francisco State College on the west coast, we don't have any HBCUs in California. And so one of the things that made San Francisco State unique and the founding of BSU or even an NSA, Negro Students Association was that it was different from the East Coast, historically black colleges.

And those colleges were focused around the privilege of having the resources to send your kids to college. No such bird animal existed in California. And so in the sixties, the early sixties to have a Negro Students Association, it took on a very different uh character focus purpose, then Howard University.

And so Marian had a lot to do with that. Uh All she's, all she knew was she read a lot of books. Her mother was in power and some of the women who were leaders of her mother's time had been introduced to her in concept. And concurrently, the brothers were liking the idea that, you know, hell man, I'm in college, you know, and I didn't make it to Howard, you know, but I, they got a program here, EOP student, maybe I can get into that and so this very insidious emergence of a pathway uh of engagement with one another and engagement in a body of thought that we had not had before.

We didn't have a gathering place where we could think on a higher education level where we were respected for thinking in that way. So, San Francisco State and concurrently City College of San Francisco almost became like partners in planting the seed for the Negro Students Association. And ultimately, why do we call ourselves Negros anyway...City College in San Francisco. San Francisco State College, 1966 they all just kind of came together, they partied together, Strawberry

Canyon. There was going to be a party, and these college students might not be at Howard, they might not be at Meharry, but we're black students and we're in college, might be a junior college. But we in college and uh we're gonna be in college come Monday too, but we gonna party tonight.

We were making it up as we went along and we didn't stop, we didn't pause in the ballpark of BSU. Yeah, I mean in NSA, we didn't pause there very long. Mainly because James Brown had said, say it loud. I'm black and I'm proud and the liberation impact of that phraseology, the dancing that went with it, the afros that grew as a consequence of it helped people to say, yeah, I never did like that word Negro anyway...the negatives associated with the term, which is very different than today. And even today, we've got black folks saying, you know, I don't know why we threw the word Negro away because it's actually an anthropologic concept.

But then it was tossed and quickly replaced with uh black student union and it stayed black student union until the strike was over, and when the strike was over. And there was an effort to uh mitigate the damage of having let so many black students in Black concepts in uh, Black Panther Party impact, uh George Murray, Huey Newton. Now FBI, how do we take this genie and put it back in the bottle? And if we can't put it back in the bottle, how can we soften its impact? And that lived too faculty members in the BSU, in the Black Studies Department proposing language that was more friendly in academia and that user friendly language was we're not gonna call the Black Studies department, we're gonna call it Africana, and of course, that made the black students say what the, what the hell Africana?

OK. We will take afro-american. But what, what the heck is Africana?

It stuck. But by this time, the students who had given birth to these concepts, they were either in jail during time from the strike or they had graduated, and they had moved on to the next level. But the influence on how the uh Africana Studies department evolved was taken away from those who gave birth to it.

00:47:53 **Sydney Jackson:** My questions that I think is very important pertaining to what we want to write the article on is, do you feel as if you dealt with a lot of misogyny while in the BSU and um, while fighting for the strike? And if so, how did it affect you and possibly the other black women that were participating? And then did it ever discourage you?

00:48:18 **Ramona Tascoe:** Well, no, it never discouraged me. But it was something that we became very aware of during the height of the strike because the sisters were

going to jail, the brothers were going to jail. The brothers were charged with crimes greater than the sisters were. So, whereas the sisters might be able to get out of jail.

Um, some of us were even a little bit more creative. You know that where we, you know, when I was arrested, I was the first student arrested. Not because I was heroic, but because I was naive and my parents, my father never found out. I was arrested.

My mother, I told her I was arrested when she was 96 and she said, maybe that's something you could have kept to yourself.

But fortunately at night, I was arrested at a time of day... it was the very first day of the train. And uh we were all told that we should come to campus early because we were gonna dispatch cadres of kids to go to different departments to announce the strike and say the school is out. So I was marching up with my cadre and one of the brothers said, Tascoe, I want you to read uh 15 demands. And when they told me they wanted me to read the 15 demands. That was just like being in church and being asked to sing a solo. You know, I said, yes, I'm feeling real good about it. And we went into the anthropology department office and um I announced that we are in San Francisco State College students, members of BS U and we're here to announce this a strike and school is now shut down and we have 15 demands.

Demand number one...And so I, I was given a long speaking part. I made it through the third demand maybe...And all of a sudden, folks who were part of my cohort or the cadre that I was part of started breaking away from the background singer position and they started doing things and making noises and engaging in activities that I didn't know were going to take place and just to make the point of how naive I was...I continued to read the demands, when the other four members of the cadre broke and ran, broke and ran and there I was left and the secretary for the BSU for the uh anthropology office said, honey, you better go, Catholicism.

00:51:30 **Ramona Tascoe:** This is true to it. Catholicism. All I knew was the logic was that I'm fighting for my rights. I'm fighting for our rights. I'm just reading the demands. I haven't done whatever was done. I didn't even know it was going to be done. So I stayed and stayed until the uh secretary said, honey. I see. You haven't done anything but run.

I broke and I ran and I fell, I got up broke and I ran and I fell again. Not by now, the secretary screaming, can't come here. And the third time when I tried to run, I was thrown to the floor and I was handcuffed behind me and I hadn't fallen. I was being tripped by the plain clothes officers who were in the hallway and it's the first day of the strike and, um, they put me in the paddy wagon alone because no one else had

been arrested. We, and they drove me down to the hall of justice and all I knew was that my parents, were going to kill me.

And I didn't know if I was gonna get out of jail. I heard through the grapevine that maybe there was a legal defense department, and they might be able to get me out of some or thing which I didn't know what that was.

But that moment of truth where I was willing to go down...

It was a momentary insanity, but it was also the, the naivety of youth. Ok? It was all I did was and I, all I know is I didn't do whatever was done. All I did was. And fortunately I had a guardian angel and that guardian angel was the person who would one day become the uh mayor for San Francisco, Willie Brown. And at the time, he was the leading civil rights lawyer for San Francisco. And our NAACP, our community-based organizations that were attached to the black churches had already decided that any of our students who had been arrested would have some legal protection. And so Willie Brown represented and uh when I was arrested, I was arrested under an alias, Mona Williams - Mona, right? Like they couldn't trace that. Don't laugh, pretty naive.

And uh when they marched in the pathway to the paddy wagon, the cameras were going, I saw channel five, channel seven, channel four hiding. My father was a news fanatic and the only thing that saved me from literally being killed after what my father went through in the South.

How how could you jeopardize the sacrifice?

But when I got it out, I got out of jail in time, a friend of mine said you're really upset. We should take you to a doctor. The doctor gave me a im injection of valium, 10 mg.

I I was smaller than I am now and I collapsed. So literally, I had to have me carry me to my parents' house. They thought something was, I had gotten sick.

My future brother-in-law was on the police force and he heard a description uh a woman, a young student, girl, female student who had been arrested and it fit by description and my brother in law figure it could be me.

So he also knew my father could be dangerous as we came to the house ostensibly to visit his future in-laws. It lost. And my father said, oh, Danny, it's so nice to see you.

No. You know, such a coincidence. You know, your sis, your future, your future sister is not feeling well. She's been back there. She, they made it home a little late when I got out of jail.

My curfew was three o'clock. I got out of jail at 4:30. They stopped me off at the doctor's office, six o'clock, I'm being carried up the stairs, collapsed. And so my brother-in-law to be comes into the room and whispers, "sweetheart, was that you who got arrested?"

True story... And I said, "uh-huh", and he covered for me. Covered for me.

My father never found out...my mother couldn't keep it to herself...

00:57:44 **Tiffany Caesar:** You were one of the few students who was able to graduate whereas some students were not. Would you talk about that a little bit?

00:57:59 **Ramona Tascoe:** I, I can speak to it a little bit but some of the students who came in under EOP weren't ready to graduate, they weren't prepared for college.

Some went back to junior college or dropped out completely, some had time to serve and were allowed to go back if they chose to...but the drive to be there wasn't strong enough, some went back and definitely did finish.

And when they went back, they went back almost with the determination to keep us far away from anybody using the word black.

Don't go anywhere near the BSU office. Recognize that your cardinal sin was that you aligned yourself with those negroes, those blacks, those blacks. And if you wanna get a degree, you'll hunker down and let that black stuff along ...Some even went back to straightening their hair.

Some kept their Afros and they were close enough to finishing that. They did. Um But there was a loss, I, it was kind of like the era of the time post COVID, during COVID, where you lose some students just because it, it's not user friendly. OK? And then when it is user friendly, you, you had to get your engine revved up to do the work. OK. And um and then some people were actually tested around the issue of, did I really wanna go to college? Because going all the way back to the days of the initial set of demands, we many of the leaders who established the 15 demands had had a solid appreciation for the value of education.



Others did not, others had a solid appreciation for the importance of fighting for your rights and then you, you didn't have to have a piece of paper, but you had a right to fight to have had an option to go.

And so it was a variety of reasons why some didn't finish. And back during that time, many of our students were uh behavioral science majors or social science majors. So they either were the, the brothers... On the other hand, most of the brothers were uh accounting.

Um I was a poly sci major poly sci, sociology, and psychology. And I think because I went to Notre Dame and even though I didn't, live the experience of being the valedictorian, I knew what it meant to apply yourself and compete and be confident that achievement was there. I just had to put in the time. And so for me, I kind of never lost my footing because as I said, I was arrested under an alias and I was not forbidden from coming to school and they didn't figure out until I told them what my, what my name was.

I told the president, Hayakawa, who I was and it was one of those brazen things that you do foolishly and you hope it doesn't backfire. But so what, what the hell if it does? OK. And he did not uh issue any retribution.

And the main reason why he didn't issue any retribution was because after all of the brothers were arrested, Maryom Al-Wadi was gone by that time, she was, she had just had a baby. Just had her baby.

And so the women who were left on the campus after the strike, I wanna say this as carefully as I can. Some of them wanted a piece of paper and a good job earning capacity, but they didn't want to fight.

They, they, they had no interest in shaking their Afros any bit, at anybody. They just wanted and some did. Ok.

Uh Judy Juanita, just bright as hell. OK. And she had a little, Afro and you know, she's outspoken and if a degree is what was needed, OK, she's gonna get her degree, ok? If uh getting a PhD was gonna take her further, uh she would take on the challenge and say, let me see. Is it? Oh yeah, I can do that.

There were women who believed in themselves as fighters, and then there were women who were in college for the same reason that my father wanted us to go to college, which was get your education just in case your husband fails you, you have a job to fall back on. You're educated enough, you can get a job and take care of

yourself. And so it was an era of time where a lot of the women who were, even members of the BSU were women or who were members of the presidium, the leadership of the BSU.

It, it, it, it wasn't in their heart, it wasn't part of their passion to be freedom fighters. So they were not trying to recreate a role for themselves like Harriet Tubman. It, some of us were offended by the, what seemed to be a failure.

Ok. What seemed to be a failure? All of the brothers being arrested, no longer having male leadership, brothers leading BSU, and the women who were around were driven back into the classroom.

And we, we never, I'm gonna say with the exception of maybe a handful of five of us, we never met as a collective again.

Uh Maryom had already gone and she was now busy being a mom and the backlash of having been in the vanguard of the fight was something that we had to, we were driven underground.

We had to pretend that it didn't matter to us, those to whom it did matter. For me, it mattered because it was like I've been living a while all my life lie Ok. I had had privilege that other blacks didn't have. And yet I felt the weight of uh being black and not being able to be proud, Ok. Being black, but not being able to talk about being black. OK, being the darkest in the family and not feeling like I could speak to that.

Uh And then the experience, all I needed was to think about my high school days and the fact I didn't get my scholarship, and I didn't get my picture in the yearbook Ok. And those were the Catholics and they were supposed to be the good ones. Ok. And that was enough to fuel me into not trusting uh white folks and especially these nuns wearing the uniform for habit.

They're just as, they're just as bad. OK. Uh Who is this Jesus guy?

01:07:10 **Tiffany Caesar:** Thank you. We just have two more questions and then we're going to wrap it up to honor your time. We will be back if you would have us because there are so many more questions. I'm sure that we would like to ask you. Ask you. So Sydney, I'll let you ask the next one. Then I'll ask the last one.

01:07:36 **Sydney Jackson:** How could you want the black women of the BSU legacy to be remembered? And how can we honor you all in academia?

01:07:46 **Ramona Tascoe:** Got you. Where did you come up with these questions?

Those are good questions.

Uh I can tell you based upon conversations with a handful of those who continued to fight two of whom had died - Carlotta Simon aka Dhamirra Simon. Ok. And uh I'm forgetting the name of the other who died.

It was enough for us, Sharon Transcona who I think is still alive but very sick.

We had been um acculturated into the role of being secondary, or into the role of being submissive, deferential and among ourselves. We would do what is so often done in the black household. You have a man who you love all you wanna love...But when it's time to have your children, raise your children with some exception, particularly under the influence of alcohol and drugs, with that exception, a black woman's gonna step up, a black woman is gonna step up.

She's gonna know...She's gonna know what she needs to do to be the woman of the household. And so we didn't, we didn't need to wear pants. We weren't in competition with the brothers. We didn't need to be stroked.

We saw what they knew to do and we saw what they didn't know, did, we saw what we knew we could do, and the importance of it being done. And so we just stepped up and in stepping up...It created...It was an indigenous evolution of who we were. If you asked us today, what was your role? We would always say the same thing.

Catch the brothers when they fell stand with the brothers when we could or when we needed to. We didn't, we didn't wait for the brothers to tell us if they needed us.

Oh, hell with you. I'm going, oh, you going to, oh, the, the brothers...And they're going up to the poly sci office with Dr. Hare, you know, Sharon Jones, little skinny Sharon Jones. Ok. Um, she wasn't terribly outspoken then, but she was a no nonsense sistah. Ok. And y'all going, where you can announce the start? Oh, yeah, I'm going and she was quick to, you know, get her head bob in. Yeah. And so we were uh organically there in, in as natural and as wholesome a way as we be a black woman.

If we would expand on that, we would like for it to be known that we weren't wallflowers.

We didn't function like our Caucasian counterparts. But there were some white women who were feisty, and they were empowered, but much of their empowerment

was because they like, and they had the privilege of being white means, finance that opportunity...so they had experience and so they knew what it meant to set up a, a legal defense, the legal defense fund, you know, if we had anybody in our family who needed legal defense, you know, we go right back home to Louisiana, Arkansas, wherever say y'all, y'all need to, so and so because you know, because so and so is in, you know, we in trouble, OK? We go to the church that's pastor, right?

But the, the, the privilege of being white and then the uh that which they could do, they were recognized for that, but it was never. No one has written about the continuum of growth, valuation, uh indigenous empowerment of the black woman. We were out out of the school of Harriet Tubman.

Walk tall, carry a big stick. Do what you need to do but you know, I ain't scared. Well, somebody gotta do it. What baby? No I'm, I'm gonna go. No, let me go. Then you just get together, we're gonna find out who's gonna do it. Ok? Well, let me just because, ok. No, you sure I shouldn't. No, I think I should do it. We're gonna fight over who's gonna do it. Ok? And then no man had to tell us to do it. Ok.

It was authentic the indigenous and it was valuable and it's still alive and well in each of us, if we're not contaminated by society's hills, drugs, this hyper sexualization of black women and the effort to try to convince black women that if they fit a certain image, maybe you're not really meant for a man, maybe, maybe you're really meant for...Stop trying to put us in a box.

We are original. We are indigenous and we're all at all you have to do is go to Africa and see how we function. And the only time we don't function that way is if we're overpowered, for example, in East Africa, in Congo, where the UN peacekeeping troops, American uh mercenaries and African military men operating under the influence of testosterone have decided that, you know, grab, grab what you want as much as you want. And in order to terrorize them, so they don't block us from doing what we're here for. We have to violate them, rape them and harm them in a permanent way. And that goes on in Africa, but it's at the hands primarily of people who don't look like us.

And I think these are truths that have to be lifted up or time eventually the affirmation that black women are all that and they come packaged in different ways. But I don't think that any of the qualities of survival and looking out for others. Uh, courage has alluded us.

01:16:25 **Tiffany Caesar:** What was the origin of the BSU in the 1968 student strike? And how would you want the BSU legacy to be remembered and honored?

01:16:45 **Ramona Tascoe:** That's a great question. It's not often asked. And when it is asked, the answer is very often taken for granted as a given.

And that is the BSU, Black Student Union, was the originator, conceptualizer, instigator, incubator of the strike. The concept that the season of assassinations had to come to an end and the hell no, we're not gonna go, the righteous indignation even if we have to do it all by ourselves as Black student union we're going to fight.

And that's why the gator incident was so incident so significant. It was foundational to the strike because it was the last straw.

And when we had a little taste of freedom and this white boy decided he was gonna try to put us in a bag, in an editorial comment published out.

It was the line in the sand that was crossed.

And when the BSU said enough, we had enough mature thinkers and that included Maryom Al-Wadi, and some brothers, who were reading literature from across the globe of the Liberation Movement.

And they were just young enough to believe it was possible, and they were just sufficiently well-read enough to kind of have an idea of how to create a movement that was rooted in color, ethnicity...

Color, First, ethnicity second, the ethnicity came second when other ethnic groups of color, various shades of color, said by hell, you know, I ain't saying that you're not having problems, you know...and yeah, I know it's been really bad. I'm just glad I am black, but it's not all that easy for us either.

It was a season of discovery that say it loud I'm black and I'm proud there were a whole lot of brown folks who were saying me neither or me too. OK? I might not be as dark as you but I I I, I'll go for black because hell, I'm tired of it too.

The, the, the, the birthing of the courage, the assertiveness, the determination, the unwillingness to go back, the recognition that the baton of civil rights was falling through all of these assassinations. And those black students grabbed open that we'll take, we'll run our own race, and we did...So it is when the strike was over. And so many other brothers who were in jail during time and some are rehabilitated through the community leaders who looked out for them like Jerry Varnado and Jimmy Garrett...

So many of the students were given and you know, part of their sentencing was, ok, You gotta do at least a year, you know, and we're not saying, you know, your position wasn't in some way valid... You'd be interested in in law school.

There was, there were communities' leaders like uh Willie Brown, Amos Brown...

I'd say Amos Brown with a degree of hesitancy because he also wanted to jump on his horse and say I did it. Then the students said that you remember the community, And we valued the community, but this was an indigenous student, and it was historic from the sense that we rose out of the ashes...

It was...that was divine.

It was our time in history to get that kind of mass movement going. You come from all different dimensions of experience and find the common thread.

And that seminal moment when it all began to make sense...

When Jerry Varnado said, the first book we're gonna read is the rich and the super-rich because you all need to know what this hustle is all about in America...

And to understand that the zero sum gain is that some will be at the top and some will be at the bottom... And the formula for America is that the ones at the bottom will always be the darkest. So black folks, if you don't wanna be at the bottom, you can gonna get your education... Ok.

And we will fight to unseat that model the zero sum get, you know, to understand the zero sum gain, zero sum is always 100%. Ok. Of that 100%, some will be on the top and some will be in the bar and the white folks will never be at the bottom until now, until now...

And that's where we are today, where white folks and Donald Trump are dealing with the reality... Some of us have it worse than niggas... oh, well, we gotta make America great again because there was a time we didn't ever have to worry about anything like that...

And so this historic moment today is something that you're gonna have to fight to hold on to, fight to perfect, maybe change the model rather than top bottom or more horizontal...

Um, but getting our students today to understand that it wasn't just about let's go on strike. Ok. On strike just down. Oh, yeah, I can do that too. Yeah. Are you gonna go? Ok. Yeah, man. Yeah, we got some, I got some goodies too... We don't need, we don't...

But you understand what I mean? When I say it was organic, it was for us because we, we felt it like we were grown, ok, we had hurt, we had suffered, we had seen our parents suffer and they had drink it and now you're killing all of our leaders who we, who are finally speaking out on our behalf, even they even were even killing the white ones... Oh my God. And you killed the black ones too. There's no, ok. These seminal moments come in history. Ok? And having our children understand that they can either be on the fence, they could be far away from the fence, or they could be looking to and say, where is this shit going? Right?

How to pre-empt being the victim again? And how to lead when you, when the prophecies of reversal first should be last, the last should be first. We're now beginning to see opportunity for us that allows us to either be higher and higher than those who would never be the lowest. How do you preserve that or how do you make way for the other, so that there's less contention, or let us think about the pragmatic reality? Is that something that is inevitable or is there some room for us to envision something different?

I heard that places in Africa are so eager for us to come, come home and enjoy the safety, the security, blah, blah.

When you come, how do you do that? How do you prepare the next generation to not see Africa as just a shithole country, continent? Ok. How do you do that? And is that the path or one of the paths?

And the College of Ethnic Studies, Africana Studies Department, it has a lot of work to do to begin to foster among its students a vision, a variety of visions, and the confidence of their capacity because we have been led to believe that all we can do is sing and dance, talk trash, be comedians, bullshit...

We, we, we know we can do that, do that, ok? And then there are those of us who learn, you know, we've got to be able to talk trash, in order to get close, they'll be able to turn it on, turn it off. What if you go to Africa? The brilliance is there... They're you're talking physics, astrophysics, They're calculating...

They're telling the computer, they're telling their calculator. Oh, no, this must check the batteries because the answer wasn't what they had already conceptualized it with it.

So, when we see these movies that described us as these brilliant people, some of them really are in Africa... Uh, yeah. And so recapturing a vision that is more expansive and wrought, not wrought with a limitation...That's strictly cultural, musical, athletic...Yeah, we're all that, but a whole lot more.

And on that note.

01:28:37 **Tiffany Caesar:** Thank you. Thank you so much.